



Arsenic

What is arsenic?

- Arsenic is a naturally occurring, gray metallic element that is found in the environment in combination with other elements. The periodic table symbol is As.
- Arsenic compounds are usually white or colorless and do not evaporate. They have no smell and usually no taste.

How does arsenic get into the environment?

- Arsenic gets into the air from industries that burn and release arsenic compounds. Also, the wind blows naturally occurring arsenic from the soil into the air.
- It dissolves in water and can settle on the ground.
- Commercially, arsenic is used as a wood preservative and in pesticides and herbicides.

How could I be exposed to arsenic?

People can be exposed to arsenic from:

- Water or food grown in your soil if you live in an area with unnaturally elevated levels of arsenic or near a hazardous waste site.
- Inhaling or ingesting arsenic dust if you work in the copper or lead smelting industries.
- Sawdust or smoke from working with or burning arsenic treated wood.
- Working or living in a building that uses pesticides that contain arsenic.

How can arsenic affect me?

Exposure to elevated levels of arsenic may cause:

- Irritation of the stomach and intestines, leading to pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea;
- Abnormal heart rhythm;
- Nerve damage;
- Corns or warts on the skin, which are not themselves a health concern, but can lead to cancer; and
- In extremely elevated levels of exposure, lung cancer or death.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has classified arsenic as a known carcinogen.

How can I tell if I have been exposed?

- If you think you have been exposed to arsenic, there are tests that can measure its presence in your blood, urine, hair and fingernails.
- Contact your physician to find out how to schedule a test.

Where can I get more information?

- For additional information, contact the Department of Environmental Management, Office of Pollution, Prevention and Technical Assistance at (800) 451-6027 ext. 3-1194.
- You may find general information about arsenic at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/ToxProfiles/phs8802.html>